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The case of single mothers in Denmark

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Dependent, Deprived or Deviant? The construction of deserving and undeserving groups – the case of single mothers in Denmark

Martin Bak Jørgensen

INTRODUCTION

Issues of ‘deservedness’ and ‘entitlement’ have long been contested policy issues in present-day welfare states. In recent years, even Scandinavian Universalist welfare states like the Danish have been influenced by the neoliberal tinge which initiated in the US and UK and diffused to the rest of Europe and arguably has led to retrenchment of established rights, welfare chauvinism and the development of a social hierarchy of stratification (Schierup, Hansen & Castles, 2006; Morris, 2002). This retrenchment or roll-back of the welfare state stands in stark contrast to Keynesian-inspired redistributive policies (Pulkingham, Fuller & Kershaw, 2010). Also in the latter type of welfare state there have been criteria for whom were entitled to what and emphasis on citizens’ duties and obligations. The question on deserving and undeserving groups can be traced back to the early history of the welfare state (e.g. Villadsen, 2004). However, neo-liberalist political ideas and attitudes have strengthened the focus on deserving and undeserving groups which are basically framed within a rhetorical question of who contributes to society and who does not. Specific groups in this sense have been singled out as especially problematic, e.g. asylum seekers, immigrants, students and unemployed. To different degrees and in different ways these groups have been met with very different policy messages conveying their value in and for society (Schneider & Ingram, 1997; 2005). Specific policy goals have been developed for the different target groups either oversubscribing or undersubscribing benefits and burdens. Some scholars have argued that advanced liberal democracies increasingly have made use of illiberal means to reach their goals (e.g. Triadafilopoulos 2011) and policy instruments often rest on moral assumptions rather than on scientifically grounded evidence. Other scholars argue that the moral panic which has broken out as response to a new urban proletariat, e.g. the consolidation of immigrant enclaves in inner cities, has made governments and policy-makers pursue policy solutions and use policy tools targeting specific groups perceived to be undeserving and need of social control and correction (e.g. Wacquant 1996). Due to an underlying assumption that the welfare states are challenged by persons and groups who might be dependent but not deserving, governments have developed policies sanctioning and punishing the groups believed to be a burden. The underlying assumption is that such groups should be controlled and

disciplined. Not only *quater sensible* (as in France), *Problemquartiers* (as in Germany), sink estates (as in the UK) or *ghettoområder* (as in Denmark) are the focus of such policies. While the former are often constructed in tropes bearing connotations of disorder, violence and crime very different groups like teenage mothers, single mothers, and elderly immigrants are constructed as social target groups for restrictive policies. The first two groups for seeking a life as welfare queens, the last one for shopping for pension' in different European welfare systems (Wacquant, 2009). The underlying logic in this case is that welfare support has been too generous and created a culture of dependency. From UK to Denmark variations of the slogan 'firm but fair' has been embedded in policy discourse and is now used in a form which carries the message 'it is only fair that we are firm' – basically it is for these groups' own good and in this case it is beneficial for the majority economically and morally. This understanding conveys a liberal-paternalist message which has become a key element of neo-liberalism. That society is liberal and free at the top and restrictive, paternalist and authoritarian at the bottom to use Loïc Wacquant's way of putting it (Wacquant, 2009: 8). It moreover points to a moral individualism and individual responsibility serving as a basis for policy-making and policy tools. Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram (1997) have drawn particular attention to the instrumental and symbolic messages that these policy target group constructions convey. Subsequently, these constructs can have real effects on the social position, behaviour and public perceptions of specific social groups. Gaps between the constructed deserving and undeserving groups becomes larger as the governments want to bind powerful groups to the state – or in many cases also the middleclass electorate (Schneider & Ingram, 1997). I develop the argument that the social construction of target groups who carry negative messages will undermine the quality of effective democracy.¹ Schneider and Ingram have described such policy designs as 'degenerative' (ibid: 5, 145). Such policy designs likewise can discourage active citizenship. They write in a later book that "Policies impact citizenship because they can encourage and facilitate participation for some, but discourage or exclude participation by others" (Schneider & Ingram, 2005: 27).

This article is interested in the 'others' in this statement. In the article I explore how categories of deserving and undeserving groups are established in policy designs of entitlements for single providers? Furthermore, I investigate how the categories of deserving and undeserving constitute the social group 'single mothers' within policy designs through gender, race, ethnicity, and class?

¹ Moving beyond elections as the proxy for substantive democracy (cf. Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

I firstly outline and discuss the theoretical backdrop of the article. In the section ‘Policy designs, neoliberalism and citizenship’, I argue that the neoliberal political rationality has been institutionalized both in policy-frameworks and as a mode of governance. The first part is discussed in the section on degenerative policy-design and the latter is discussed in the section on new paternalism and social exclusion. In the sections, I make use of empirical examples to illustrate the main arguments. The examples are taken from both different national contexts from both Europe and the US. Obviously, the states have very different welfare state models with different types of tax systems and models of distribution. This fact makes it hard to compare the examples but that is not the purpose either. I use the examples to show theoretically how similar target group constructions can be recognized in different contexts. This makes it able to identify the mechanisms of social exclusion in different contexts. Furthermore, I will argue that despite contextual and structural differences representations can travel and ideas can be diffused across continents. Neoliberalism for instance originated in the US and the UK but spread broadly elsewhere.

Secondly, I look at the literature on single mothers/parents and situate the present article within this. This part discusses first how single mothers have been constructed as a target group (in a US context) and how these representations have spread to elsewhere. I look on the literature on single mothers and discuss how the research literature predominantly from English-speaking countries can be translated into a Danish context. Finally, I look at intersections between gender, class and race from a theoretical perspective and look at how single mothers also are racialised.

Thirdly, I look at how single mothers are constructed as a social target group in Danish policy-making. I look at how this particular group is constructed in policy discourse and how it is framed and embedded in the policy framework in recent years. Policy discourse here encompasses legislative texts, rules and regulations, action plans as well as the political debate about the issue. There is a clear difference between policy documents and political opinions but the latter types of texts are very important in order to analyse the broader support and legitimation of target group constructions. Although there are in principle numerous competing constructions of a particular ‘problem’, governments and their political support stand in a privileged position because their particular problem constructions tend to ‘stick’ (Bacchi, 2009: 33). Their versions are constituted in policies, legislation and technologies used to govern. They can decide when an issue demands attention and when it does not.

In doing so, I analyse the policy rationales and tools applied for this target group and look at how such constructions impact on the democratic system and citizenship. Furthermore, I argue that single mothers also constitute a diverse group as the intersections between gender, race/ethnicity, and class influence the

construction of the specific target groups and policy messages and tools. My argument is that the particular target group construction conveys a message as well as having the real life implications that the single mothers (and in particularly single mothers with ethnic minority background). They are separated from the broader citizenry and divided according to a moral hierarchy of entitlement and deservedness as also Joe Soss has argued (Soss, 2005: 321). Consequently, such a policy design can be regarded as an example of a degenerative policy-design and constitute a threat to substantive democracy.

The empirical material used in the analysis includes the policy documents and political opinions mentioned above as well as statistical material on single providers and media material containing stories about single mothers.

POLICY DESIGNS, NEOLIBERALISM AND CITIZENSHIP

In *Punishing the Poor* from 2009, Wacquant delivers a powerful analysis on how neoliberal governance has strengthened social divisions in society and led to policy-making seeking to punish and discipline ‘problematic’ groups thereby redefining the modalities of government action (Wacquant, 2009). Going beyond the conventional description of economic deregulation and welfare state devolution he describes the neoliberal trend through a number of interrelated tendencies: commodification of public goods and the rise of underpaid jobs against the backdrop of enduring joblessness; retrenchment of social protection schemes implying that collective rights are replaced by a cultural trope of individual responsibility; the reinforcement and extension of the punishment apparatus based on a logic of zero tolerance (ibid: 5; 7). Nikolas Rose provides a similar understanding arguing that advanced liberal democracies are developing into ‘societies of control’ (Rose, 2000). He argues that governments increasingly draw on a logic of responsibilisation calling for “personal responsibility, control over one’s own fate, self-promotion and self-government” (ibid: 329). The backside of this logic is a growing insecurity and new bases for exclusion creating new forms of marginalization. Within this political logic, emphasizing individual responsibility is hence a necessary tool for revitalizing welfare societies. In practice this means that behaviour needs to be controlled and corrected. Lone mothers for instance continue to be deserving of support as long as they behave in ways which demonstrate willingness to participate and individual responsibility for their own and their family’s income (Gazso, 2009).

The new paternalism and social exclusion

Rose’s perspective is in line with Wacquant’s notion of liberal-paternalism as described in the introduction. The assumed and just difference between top and

bottom of society legitimises the perception that some target groups not only strain public expenses but also constitute a threat to the moral order. The hierarchy of social stratifications creates a position of moral superiority for top of society making it possible both to criticize specific groups believed to have lower standards as well as making it seem just and fair to punish these groups. An illustrative example on single mothers and new paternalism can be the so-called Carina case which took place after the recent Danish elections in 2011. A member from the newly constituted government party Socialist People's Party (SF) had a public discussion with another MP from a liberalist party (Liberal Alliance) about Denmark lacking an official poverty level and Özlem Cekic from SF argued that many people dependent on public benefits lived in poverty. To illustrate this she brought the other MP Joachim B. Olsen to meet Carina who was an example of such a person. A single mother who was long-time unemployed and supported by social benefits.² Carina turned out to have what was perceived as a substantial amount of money left to pay for food, clothes, dentist bills, cigarettes and a dog after all expenses were paid and the public who had been following this debate responded with stark indignation. Carina was *not* poor it was written in several letters to the national newspapers and on blogs etc. on the Internet. In other words Carina was not a deserving recipient of public benefits. Rather, her behaviour should be controlled and corrected. Carina was depicted not as deprived but as deviant. From being a principle discussion on poverty, it develops into a question of individual pathology. The consequence of this development is that focus disappears from structural conditions causing poverty to become a question of individual behaviour and responsibility. Not only right-winged parties and voters held this attitude, also the government party the Social Democrats rejected that Carina was poor and deserving. A poll made by Gallup in early 2012, after the case was discussed in public, showed that 26 percent of the respondents felt that the right to social services has gone too far, and that citizens should be better to take care of themselves (Winther, 2012). Personalization, as described by Rose, also contains characteristics as self-promotion, self-governance and flexibility (Rose, 2000: 329) but those characteristics are not accessible by people like Carina.

The explanation for why people end up like Carina, i.e. being dependent on social benefits and showing lack of moral is however twofold. One level subscribes this to (lack of) individual responsibility while the other level finds the explanation in the society which produces 'losers', dependents, and 'welfare

² Examples on how the story unfolded can be found in different newspapers, e.g. <http://www.metroxpress.dk/nyheder/er-carina-fattig-eller-ej/KObkkB!P0oddva8ulgI/>; <http://jp.dk/opinion/ordeterdit/article2621797.ece>; <http://www.information.dk/telegram/289587>; <http://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/emner/carina-sagen>; <http://www.b.dk/emne/tags/carina-sagen>

queens'. The collective or societal level is extremely important as this is where we would expect to find the policy tools to combat inequality but likewise is it here that the persistence of social inequality can be identified. Growing structural and social inequality seems to be accepted by the advantaged groups in society. Staying within the Danish context, recent years have shown an institutionalisation of this policy framing, which I will return to in more detail later in the article. But also in public debates this frame is articulated (e.g. Dahl & thyssen, 2006; Olesen, 2007; Ågerup, 2007). The debates formulate a powerful message, dividing society into different groups with different statuses and privileges. Distinctions which can likewise be identified in public policies and policy programs.

Degenerative policy-designs

Schneider and Ingram have offered a conceptual framework for understanding degenerative policy-designs and analyse target group constructions. Public policies are the primary tools through which governments and policy-makers inscribe, exploit, entrench, perpetuate or change such social constructions (Schneider & Ingram, 2005: 5). As also Deborah Stone argues, policies constitute and consolidate particular ways of thinking about social problems and social groups (Stone, 1997). Although social construction of target groups can be changed they do so very slowly and show strong persistence. The present framing of single mothers for instance still draws heavily on Reaganite narratives of welfare queens (e.g. Blake, 2012; Gilliam Jr. 1999; Hing, 2011). Although these representations originate from a US context they have diffused to a European context. Schneider and Ingram conceptualize the target group constructions in terms of the negative or positive messages they convey as well as in terms of whether they define the different groups as being either powerful or weak (Schneider & Ingram, 1997: 113). Advantaged target populations have significant political power resources, enjoy positive social constructions, and are characterised as deserving groups. Dependents are groups with less political power resources but are still constructed as deserving in a moral sense although they are regarded as helpless and in need of correction and discipline. Contenders have resources that compare to that of advantaged groups but are not regarded as deserving. Deviants constitute weak and powerless groups who are negatively constructed as undeserving and of no value for society (Schneider & Ingram, 2005: 17). They can nevertheless be perceived as a threat to morality and normality, for instance as in the perceived promiscuous lifestyles of single mothers constituting a threat to the nuclear family. Burdens are oversubscribed and benefits undersubscribed for the undeserving groups and vice versa for the deserving groups. Positive and weak (dependents) or strong (advantaged) groups are often seen as deserving measures that support their position as they offer opportunities for political gain if these groups are approached favorably. In

contrast, negative and strong (contenders) or weak (deviants), constructed groups pose political risks for positive treatment and political opportunities for negative measures. However, only two of these in reality offer clear-cut political opportunities. That is providing benefits to advantaged groups and burdens to groups constructed as deviant (Schneider & Ingram, 1997: 114). Schneider & Ingram argue that “[m]uch of the dynamics of policy design for dependent people hinges on separating the deserving from the undeserving” (ibid: 124). The particular target group construction legitimates the chosen tools, rules and rationales for delivering benefits and burdens. These constructs also characterize how policies are implemented and with what kind of message. Home-owners for instance is a group characterized in positive terms in most national settings and as a group who cannot be subscribed to financial burdens even when states are in dire need of securing public funding. In Denmark, the financial gains obtained by selling property that has gained in value has been extreme, yet no political parties except for the most leftist party (Enhedslisten) have wanted to even propose tax on property sale while taxes at the same time are introduced in other domains, and sanctions and cut-backs are allegedly introduced on regular basis to meet ends. The austerity-programs currently sweeping across Europe have intensified the claims for deficit-cutting and lowering public spending but at the same time hit the bottom of society much harder than the top. Consequently, burdens are oversubscribed for the former while there more or less is status quo for the latter. The increasing surveillance and control of social benefit recipients is undertaken with great endeavor whereas there is for instance very few actions targeting multi-national companies not paying tax in Denmark although it has been a debated issue in most countries. Detecting fraud has a double aim for governments and public authorities. Firstly, fraud cannot be accepted and can undermine the social trust that the welfare system is based on. Secondly, introducing new means of control and surveillance sends a clear signal not only to the targeted groups but just as importantly to the strong, advantaged group that such behavior by other groups will not be tolerated. The tools used often involve anonymous tip-offs, long-term surveillance, and other means. Governments tend to exaggerate the outcome of these tools to strengthen the message they wish to send.

In an American context Kaaryn S. Gustafson has shown how welfare policies within the last decades have been informed by popular beliefs that welfare fraud is rampant (Gustafson, 2011). The consequence is, like also Wacquant argues, that welfare policies have become more punitive which blurs the boundaries between the welfare system and the criminal justice system. Consequently, the target group constructions may lead to policy tools which end up marginalising and excluding groups in society rather than enabling them to enter the labour-market for instance. Such policy logics can be regarded as degenerative policy-designs. These are in Schneider and Ingram’s own words: “systems [that] are

characterized by an unequal distribution of political power, social constructions that separate the “deserving” from the “undeserving”, and an institutional culture that legitimizes strategic, manipulative, and deceptive patterns of communication and uses of political power” (1997: 102). In such a system, group-based political inequalities and divisive policy designs reinforce in ways that threaten democracy (Soss, 2005: 293). They convey different messages about how the government works, how it responds and how it values the particular target group. Those messages have an influence towards the target group’s orientation to government, to identity, to political participation, to citizenship, and to democracy itself. In sum, the point of departure for this article is that policy designs have material effects and consequences in terms of inclusion and exclusion. William Isaac Thomas formulated this already in 1923 when he stated that “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas & Thomas, 1928), i.e. the interpretation of a situation causes the action. Stigmatizations risk becoming internalized and becoming self-fulfilling prophecies.

Where would we place abovementioned Carina then? In the literature, single mothers have often been portrayed as dependent and therefore a group constructed as deserving of public assistance. However, the neo-liberal rationality directing policy-making increasingly constructs single mothers as deviants. Wacquant makes a similar observation by saying that “poor single mothers have been aggressively *typecast not as deprived but as deviant*, a problem population whose civic probity is by definition suspect and whose alleged work-avoiding “behaviours” must be urgently rectified by means of preclusion, duress, and shaming” (Wacquant, 2009: 98). The construction of target populations is influenced by the dominant moral individualism found presently and thereby is also decisive for the policy tools and rules used to solve the alleged problem. Degenerative policy-making is based on an idea that almost any construction of people and issues is possible and can vie for legitimacy without significant constraints from factual, empirical or scientific evidence (Schneider & Ingram, 1997: 105). Wacquant argues in the same line when he claims that: “social and economic structures disappear to make room for reasoning of a marginalist kind that debase collective causes to rank of “excuses” in order to better justify individual sanctions” (Wacquant, 2009: 9). It becomes a question of individual pathologies like in the aforementioned Carina-case.

The challenge to citizenship

The social construction of target groups through public policies consequently convey powerful messages about who matters in society, who is of special value, who deserves attention and who does not, and who can be ignored or punished (Schneider & Ingram, 2005: 19). These types of constructions

therefore has enormous influence on citizenship, as Schneider and Ingram also write, the institutionalization of bias has impact on citizenship roles and civic participation (ibid.). When differences in the characteristics of target groups are systematically associated with differences in allocation of benefits and burdens, choice of policy tools and political rationality this also leads to distinctions in policy design that, in turn, will produce different understandings of citizenship and democracy among target groups (Schneider & Ingram, 1997: 112). Social construction of the underlying social problem and the involved target groups hence risk becoming real in their consequences. The crucial point seen from a citizenship perspective is that individuals who are perceived to take responsibility for their own life and situation, and to govern themselves morally, thereby also refuse to become members of the moral community (Rose, 2000: 335). They can therefore not expect to enjoy the same rights and entitlements as behaving citizens. Consequently citizenship becomes conditional upon conduct (ibid.).

SINGLE MOTHERS – DEPRIVED OR DEVIANTS?

In the following I will focus on the construction of a particular target group. That of single mothers.³ Single mothers (and single parenthood) have been studied from different research perspectives. One strand of literature looks at single mothers' dual position as being both mothers and potential workers (e.g. Duncan & Edwards, 1999). Other studies have looked at everyday life experiences and practices, how policy affect life, and the forms of agency and claims-making single mothers have access to and engage in (e.g. Lister, 2004). The present article places itself within a type of studies exploring problem representations and role of public policy in relation to single mothers (e.g. Benson-Smith, 2005; Dwyer, 2004; Lewis, 2001; Pulkingham, Fuller & Kershaw, 2010; Schram, 2005).

The latter studies argue that individual choices (including single mothers) are shaped and defined through political discourses based on individualisation, paternalism, and neoliberalism formulated through welfare-to-work programs and moral correctives (e.g. Gazso, 2009). Amber Gazso argues that caring

³ Here I think mainly of single mothers as women having once been in a relationship with a partner. The current debate on Single Mothers by Choice (SMC) or choice mothers have a different nature and are less relevant for this analysis although the felt stigmatization of being a single mother may be more or less the same. The difference is that the SMC's often are resourceful and not unemployed nor are they accused of social fraud and hence do not fit into the target populations constructed by the public policies I am looking at.

choices of mothers can be seen as detrimental to neoliberalism, Third Way policies and what she terms ‘market citizenship’ which demands that mothers enter the labour market or welfare-to work programs to be considered deserving (ibid.). This stands in contrast to past times when mothers were seen as deserving of support also when remaining outside the labour market, as their role in caring for young children and bringing up future citizens was regarded as valuable in itself. Peter Dwyer makes the same argument by claiming that “rights are conditional on the acceptance of individual responsibilities” (Dwyer, 2004: 282). Individual responsibilities are market responsibilities, hence the role as informal caregiver is basically considered without value if a person claims social benefits (Gazso, 2009: 12). These studies point to the fact that single mothers have gone from being dependent (and rightfully deserving) and/or deprived to now being deviant. Standing outside the labour market with caring obligations is regarded as one’s own responsibility and can be ascribed to a lack of character and moral stance.

Most empirical studies, also comparative studies, stem from the English-speaking countries, especially US and UK. So how do these findings resonate in a Danish context, which is the focus for the analytical part of this article?

Stories of immigrant ‘welfare scroungers’ have been popular in both the political discourse and public media (e.g. Hervik, 1999). Danish sociologists and welfare state- and labour historians have shown how distinctions between deserving and underserving groups go back to the birth of the social state and welfare state as well as studying citizens’ encounters with the welfare system (e.g. Christiansen, 2001; 2006; Mik-Meyer & Villadsen, 2012; Villadsen, 2004). Other studies have looked at social exclusion, marginalization, and public health policies which also relate to the research questions of this article (e.g. Larsen et al. 2012; Vallgård, 2007). However, in the past there has been less focus on single mothers as a societal problem. Pauline Stoltz, for instance, argues in an article from 1997 that Denmark differs from England and the US where “single mothers have been regarded by their respective governments as constituting a social and moral ‘problem’” (Stoltz, 1997: 425). In Denmark the role of single mothers is not a distinct issue for social policies, she argues. First of all, single mothers are not distinguished from single parents in general. Her article is based on the relationship between being mother and worker. Here the Universal welfare state has shown to be gender neutral and social rights of single mothers are part of this system of universal rights. Therefore there is no system of moral regulation of single mothers. Birte Siim provides a similar argument by saying that: “Lone mothers have not been singled out as an ideological problem or as a political issue” although there are concerns about the growing numbers and level on unemployment (Siim, 1999: 3). She repeats this argument a bit later and further claims that “lone motherhood has been regarded as a life-style choice”

(ibid: 9). The explanation is the same as given by Stoltz. The Danish welfare state is gender neutral, has been characterized as women-friendly although devalues informal care work as the aim of the welfare state is to have dual income earners. Stoltz and Siim both provide historical analyses of the policy development and position of single mothers in a Danish context. I agree in these historical descriptions but will at the same time argue that single mothers indeed *have* been problematised in the years to follow.

Both articles are from the 1990s and the neoliberal policy rationality was institutionalised with the Liberal-Conservative government who won power in 2001. From then on, the construction of weak and strong target groups becomes stronger and installs sharper distinctions between deserving and undeserving groups. Pensioners for instance gain a lot of positive attention and are understood to be a dependent but deserving target group. Immigrants, especially asylum seekers and family-related forms of migration do not deserve the level of public support, which until then was allocated to them, and their presence should be limited and rights restricted. Likewise, I will argue that single mothers are increasingly singled out as a special problematic and negatively constructed target group.⁴ This is especially visible when the target group of single mothers intersects with categories of ethnicity and religion. A single Muslim mother does not necessarily have the same position as a single white, Christian mother – despite the structural framework of the Universal welfare state. Basically the group goes from being positively constructed although dependent on assistance in some situations, to coming closer to the narrative of the welfare queen known from the US. That said, single motherhood at the same time also can be portrayed as an individual choice. Searching the newspaper database *Infomedia* offers several stories regarding these mothers who rarely are unemployed and in general are resourceful. Arguably, single mothers today constitute two very different groups. Here I concentrate on the first type. However, class difference is not the only divisive characteristic distinguishing single mothers. Single motherhood is also portrayed through racial and ethnic categories.⁵

⁴ A recent article however, can be seen as a support for Siim's and Stoltz's point of departure. Albrekt Larsen and Dejgaard in a quantitative media study show that very few stories on welfare recipients and poor are related to single mothers (2012). However, I will argue that looking blogs and commentaries to articles published online definitely show negatively images of single mothers (e.g. Holt, 2010; TV2 Øst, 2010). Likewise is this negative construction very evident in policy-documents as the analysis will show. Stories relating to social fraud are very often linked to stories of single mothers.

⁵ It should be mentioned that single providers also can be single fathers. This is an obvious fact but there is very little research on this group however, and in the policy document and public and political discourse this group is not problematized in a similar way. They share some commonalities in having to manage having full-time jobs (or

Not only single mothers but racialised single mothers

As the studies on intersectionalism have shown, the intersection of different categories construct different positions in society. A Black unemployed mother will not have the same position as a White unemployed mother for instance. Gazco for instance shows that non-White single mothers in both Canada and Britain are likely to be poorer than other (Gazso, 2009). However, in Britain almost 50 percent of Black Caribbean households were single parents in 2001, whereas 36 percent of African Black households had this status again compared to 22 percent of White households and ‘only’ 13 and 10 percent of Pakistani and Indian households (Mokhtar & Platt, 2009). The labour market segregation is affected by both gender and race/ethnicity. Differences cannot be explained through grand deterministic interpretations of ethnicity or culture. As Nira Yuval-Davis argues, it is important to acknowledge that “while all social divisions share some features and are constructed by/intermeshed with each other”, they are not reducible to each other (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 200; see also Jørgensen, 2012; Walby, 2007).

The image of the Black welfare queen as already introduced previously has a very long history from the ‘lazy promiscuous Jezebel’ figure from the past to the US food-stamp moms of today. These images are very persistent and also today images of Black mothers evoke hostile attitudes to welfare support (e.g. Gustafson, 2011; Pulkingham, Fuller & Kershaw, 2010; Schram, 2005). Although race as a category is less prominent in Denmark than in the US (and UK), the same dynamics are nevertheless present. Ethnic minority background is decisive for the public attitudes and eventually target group constructions. Two Danish political scientists recently did a comparative study on Britain, Sweden, and Denmark on how poor and welfare recipients are depicted in British, Danish, and Swedish newspapers. They argue that there is an institutional welfare-regime logic behind the way the poor and welfare recipients are depicted in the mass media (Albrekt Larsen & Dejgaard, 2012). They claim it is not only a matter of race but in Sweden and Denmark poor and welfare

being unemployed) and being responsible for housework and childcare. The lack of public attention could reflect a problematisation claiming that this is not a problem – compared to the problems pertaining to single mothers. In the policy documents fathers are mainly referred to as the ones being ‘absent’ – the ones picking up the kids occasionally and so on and so forth. In the individual stories of single providers picked up by the newspapers all the subjects are mothers and all have more or less problematic relationships with their former husbands. Nevertheless single fathers officially constitute one fifth of all single providers in Denmark and hence is a substantial group. It goes beyond the scope of this article to go further into these differences. The general lack of research attention shows that there is work to be done here to get a more nuanced understanding of single providers and their position in society.

recipients have increasingly come to be perceived as non-white, especially so in Denmark. They show that in Denmark non-whites constitute 24 percent of the images in positive topics of poor and 62 percent of the images of poor in negative topics on poor (ibid: 26). Neither Siim nor Stoltz referred to above mentioned race or ethnicity in their analyses and the racialisation of single mothers is perhaps a recent tendency becoming prominent and very evident throughout the last decade. It is however, also a dimension which has been given little research attention as most focus has been on gender (as also argued by Mokhtar & Platt, 2009). Adding a racial/ethnic dimension to the target group constructs makes it possible to show how characteristics are explicated. It shows how societal norms and expectations for behaviour are not colour-blind. If indeed the Danish welfare state model is gender neutral it is not neutral in terms of policy tools and rationales as the next section will give an example on.

CONSTRUCTING SINGLE MOTHERS IN DENMARK

The number of single parents has grown considerable in the last 20 years. In 1992 there were 138,068 persons registered as single parents out of a total of 754,682 families with children. 116,388 of the single parents were single mothers. In 2012 the number has increased to 144,222 single mothers, 30,782 single fathers out of a total of 770,830 (Danmarks Statistik, 2012). In Copenhagen, one third of all families with children in 2009 were single parents (Københavns Kommune, 2011). Both the number of single mothers and fathers has increased but proportionally the number of single mothers is much higher than that of single fathers. These numbers do not say anything about the single parents' position in society however. We lack more recent data but a study done by CASA in 2005 shows that single mothers constitute an underprivileged group, especially in relation to education and employment (CASA, 2005). Likewise they have lower incomes on a general level and are more dependent on social benefits than other groups (ibid.). A more recent report, also done by CASA, shows that even during the economic upturn from 2003-2008 single mothers benefited less from the upturn than other groups. The level of single mothers being dependent on social benefits only fell by 12 percent whereas it fell by 21-23 percent for other groups (CASA, 2008).

Target groups, rules and rationales

In Denmark single parents are entitled to social assistance (ordinary and extra children support; housing support; residual/free place in daycare institutions) to meet the extra expenses such have. If the other parent not having the child living with him/her is not able to pay the stipulated contribution, an additional support (special child support) is available. The key criterion for both types of special

benefit is whether or not the applicant is a ‘genuine single’ (*reelt enlig*).⁶ This status according to the law has to be confirmed once a year, although many municipalities require that the applicant send in a formula every month and likewise all changes in personal relations and income must be notified to the municipality.⁷ The rules stipulating eligibility for social benefits as a single parent are quite simple. If one parent has the custody of the child and thereby most financial burdens he/she is eligible to extra support. The client as mentioned must establish this eligibility him/herself through an application scheme and holds the responsibility of informing the authorities if important changes in life conditions happen. This is one of the control mechanisms established to make sure that the citizens behave as the state would like them to. Whereas citizens in most aspects have to report things that effect their rights and entitlements by themselves and are perceived to be autonomous beings, the target group constructions of dependent and deviant groups cancel the trust on citizens responsibility and introduce positive and negative incitements serving to control and discipline the target group. One example is confirmations like the one just mentioned. Other examples are contracts between the citizen and the municipality, stipulating the rules for appropriate behavior as well as the sanctions – most often economic – when the contract is not fulfilled. The use of contracts has grown immensely during the 2000s and is used in different policy domains (Andersen, 2003).⁸

The concept of genuine single is very hard to define however and the criteria are indeterminate making it difficult for the municipalities to assess if a person is single or not (KL, 2008a; Social- og Integrationsministeriet, 2012). In reality, there are no fixed guidelines however. It is not put down anywhere how much time you can spend together with an ex-partner and still be considered single and entitled to extra benefits. The administrative practices are described in a handbook by Local Government Denmark which is meant to assist the

⁶ The notion was implemented with the Children Allowance Law from 1973 (Børnetilskudsloven) (LBK nr 439 af 14/05/2009). Genuine single not only means not living in a marriage but also not living in a marital-like/conjugal relation (*ægteskabslignende*).

An example of the formula can be found here: https://www.oib.dk/home/borger/stamkort/blanketter/fy/fy502e/2010_10-01/fy502e.aspx?EntityCode=751

⁸ Immigrants on temporary residence permits for instance have to sign integration contracts stipulating the expectations of the state of what it implies to be a ‘good’ citizen and thereby eligible for both financial support as well as the possibility of applying for permanent residence. There are contracts on how parents are responsible for their children and their attendance in school. Not fulfilling these contracts can result in the child-allowance being reduced and in worst case in the children being removed from home. Contracts as mentioned is used in different policy domains but often in relations between the authorities (state/municipality) and dependent or deviant groups.

municipalities (KL, 2008b). In practice, the guidelines are stipulated through three cases dealt with by the National Social Appeals Board in 1999. The decision and the dissemination of this are crucial as it states that: “that there should not be proper evidence that there is a marital-like relationship” in order to terminate the social assistance and demand that assistance is paid back (Den Sociale Ankestyrelse, 1999:1). In practice, this means that the municipalities only have to render it probable that a person is claiming benefits that he/she is not entitled to.

The problem with these targeted social benefits is that they go hand in hand with distrust and increased control as discussed above. The distrust is implemented in various control systems as the municipal control units granted substantial power to pursue their task and in the end legitimise the distrust itself. Consequently, to make sure that the municipality does not pay out subsidies to single parents who can support themselves financially, the municipality also needs a comprehensive system of control. This assumption, that social fraud is increasing, is the baseline for many of the recent changes and policy actions undertaken in the last years. There is no empirical evidence for either the proportion of social fraud itself or evidence that it is growing. In the guidelines from 2008 Local Government Denmark writes that: “It could be interesting to know the monetary results of the controls undertaken today. Unfortunately we do not know if there is a real increase in the number of persons cheating or if it is an expression of a growing attitude among the population that social fraud is unacceptable” (KL, 2008b: 41). The text continues by stating that: “But although we at the moment do not know if there is a real increase in the number of social fraud cases, then more municipalities believe that there is more organized social fraud” (ibid.).⁹

⁹ Basing policies and action plans on assumptions and false statistics is not limited to the actions taken against social fraud. Another example is the development of the action plan launched to help immigrant women out of isolation, i.e. women neither in employment, recipients of social benefits nor educational programs. The argument was that cultural traditions and their men forced them to stay at home without contact to society. According to then Minister of Social Affairs Eva Kjer Hansen Statistics Denmark had data that 13,000 women from non-Western countries could be characterized as isolated. This spurred a public moral panic calling for actions (action plans, initiatives, even demands of divorces) and the minister responded to the panic by launching the action plan. Statistics Denmark rejected this particular reading of the numbers. The chief of communication at the agency said that numbers said that 13,000 women lived as housewives but did not say anything about isolation at all and further said that there were 37,000 men and 47,000 women with Danish origin with a similar profile in the data without anyone claiming that they were isolated (Nielsen, 2005). The minister had to admit that it was wrong when she said that data showed that there were 13,000 isolated female immigrants in Danish society. Nevertheless, a campaign was initiated alongside an action plan without any supporting evidence that there was a

This is in line with Gustafson's findings from a US context (Gustafson, 2011). Likewise a report from a transversal ministerial committee on better control concludes that there is no knowledge about nor valid estimates on the total abuse of social benefits, but estimates suggest 91 municipalities made claims for back payment amount to €6,7 million (Tværministerielt udvalg om bedre kontrol, 2010: 17). But they add to this by stating that: "However, it is the committees' belief that efforts should be pursued more actively for welfarepolitical and economical reasons, as it is evident that the potential is larger" (ibid.). To comparison, the committee estimates the value of moonlighting to amount to €2,8 billion (ibid: 25). Yet, the proposal of the committee is to increase the control of social fraud especially targeting genuine singles. In similar manners, the newspapers are full of stories of potential gains for the municipalities in revealing social fraud (e.g. TV2 Øst, 2010; Holt, 2010). These stories have the single mother in the center, and most of the tips the municipalities receive deal with single mothers (ibid.). However, in the stories describing the strategy in different municipalities it is again underlined that the amount of fraud is unknown (Holt, 2010). In a report on the municipal decisions in relation to stopping social benefits to single parents the State Administration that 49 percent were directly wrong and later revoked and that in 26 percent of the cases the foundation for the decision was weakly documented and in 23 percent of the cases not at all (Statsforvaltningen Sjælland, 2011: 2).

Nevertheless, the overall message repeated by state authorities is one of social fraud being a growing phenomenon and that increased control is the solution. Especially the category of genuine singles, i.e. single parents, is constructed as target group and as the gender distribution mentioned above shows, it is in reality a construction of single mothers. The municipalities were in 2008 requested to introduce more control and strengthen the effort against social fraud by the now abolished Ministry of Welfare (Ministerialtidende, 2009). The same message was repeated in 2011 with a new political agreement on strengthened efforts against social fraud by the former government, Danish People's Party and Christian Democrats (Regeringen, 2011).¹⁰ The logic in the agreement

problem to address with the initiatives. The problematisation of the chosen lifestyle in itself legitimized the policy actions (cf. Bacchi, 2009).

¹⁰ The agreement is built on the recommendations from the Ministerial Committee referred to previously, however, it ignores the fact that there is no evidence to support the idea that social fraud is increasing but nevertheless introduces 29 new initiatives all stepping up the control with selected target groups (ibid.). Whereas the Ministry of Welfare few years previously described two main target areas/groups: single providers and moonlighting, the latter is marginalized in the new agreement and focus is on the first type of social fraud. This type of fraud is connected to the debate of ghettos and the previous government's ghetto-strategy as these have higher concentrations on citizens

simply is that more people are taking advantage of the system, which undermines the social trust that the welfare model is build on. The polls done in the aftermath of the Carina case support that the public attitude is changing and that there is responsiveness from the government – past and present – as there are considerable political gains. Yet there are no data supporting that there *is* more social fraud and that, despite an extreme growth in anonymous tip-offs, there is evidence that single mothers cheat more than others, despite the stories saying so. These policy papers convey an unmistakable message, namely that single providers are prone to cheating more than other people and should therefore be pursued and punished. The intersection with the ghetto-discussion adds an ethnic dimension to the rationale. It reinforces that ethnicity is a part of the explanation, and solutions should be sought accordingly. Likewise does it feed the negative stereotypical constructions of ethnic minority groups as unable or unwilling to support themselves. In a response to the NGO Den Sociale Retshjælp, an independent social-juridical organization, who during a hearing process had proposed that the category of genuine single was clarified, Inger Støjberg, then Minister of Employment, responded that “the consideration for social cohesion carries more weight than the rule of law” in relation to recover personal information to reveal social fraud (Beskæftigelsesministeren, 2011). Following Carol Bacchi, the statement from the Minister on the one hand is a political statement from a politician but on the other hand is a statement from a minister and carries more weight than statements from other actors – it ‘sticks’ and it sends a signal to the municipalities that they are doing the right thing. This message is strengthened through narrated ‘successes’ of more people tipping each other off anonymously regardless of the fact that many cases are unfounded (*cf.* the State Administration report). Moreover, it illustrates a degenerative policy design as established rights are ignored to pursue a specific political agenda targeting a negatively socially constructed target group.¹¹

Tools and rules

All municipalities are obliged to establish so-called control teams as well as possibilities for citizens to submit suspicions and accusations of social fraud anonymously.¹² The control units are used to gather data used in the cases

dependent on social benefits, consequently, these will also constitute a target group prone to cheating (see Regeringen, 2010).

¹¹ It is also interesting that the Ministerial committee indeed acknowledged that was a need to produce proper control guidelines to avoid the diverging interpretations which the municipalities employ when assessing if a person is deserving of social benefits or not (Tværministerielt udvalg om bedre kontrol, 2010: 44).

¹² See for instance the web resources of the control unit and ways of reporting suspicions of social fraud in the municipality of Aarhus: <http://www.aarhus.dk/da/borger/oekonomi/Socialt-bedrageri.aspx>. The control unit here

against individual clients. The tools used by these control units could be monitoring a client's house to see who visits, and how frequently; To see if shoes belonging to a man are left outside the door during the night; If anyone borrows the car; Investigate transactions and transference on bank account. In some cases the control unit monitored facebook profiles and even created false profiles to be able to interact with a given target and keep track on updates on social life (Gaardmand, 2011a; Gaardmand & Gjerding, 2011). This is an extreme case of surveillance and one which has dubious results. Comments given on a social network may not be accurate or may have completely other meanings than what the control unit might believe them to have. Sascha for instance, was monitored for more than a year and was not informed about this before 11 months after the investigation was initiated by the control group. During some periods, the control units passed her home on a daily basis to observe (Gaardmand, 2011c). They looked after male shoes and scrutinized her facebook profile. One of the findings leading to the decision of revoking her social benefits on the ground that she was believed to live together with her ex-boyfriend and father of her children, was that he tagged a photo uploaded of Sascha and her sister with the comment 'nice women'. Sascha complained to the National Social Appeals Board which ruled in favour of Sascha.

Most often these tips come from other citizens. In Aarhus, the city council employed pensioned police officers to undertake the control as they 'knew how to do efficient surveillance' (Gaardmand, 2011b). As the municipalities do not need any hard evidence to make a case but only render it probable that a client is committing social fraud, all these different types of tools are used to do exactly so. In this case the sanctions and burdens are heavily oversubscribed compared to tools used towards other groups. There is for instance little, almost disappearing, control on the working conditions of au-pair girls despite the fact that there are explicit rules for the type of work such can do, and for how many hours, and research showing that many indeed are exploited (e.g. Stenum, 2008). Control for this group is undersubscribed as the employers of au-pair is a strong, advantaged group. The case of Camilla follows a similar plot as the one of Sascha. An anonymous tip to the control unit claimed that her ex-husband visited her far too frequently to legitimate that she should have extra social benefits (Gaardmand & Gjerding, 2011). She lost all benefits and was requested to pay back benefits she was not entitled to. The main proof was that she had once paid an electricity bill for her ex-husband, something she found natural as he was in need of money, but as the kids still had to visit him she decided to pay the bill. The civil servants did not buy that argument and thought that was very

has also issued a handbook in social fraud used as a satirical instrument to inform citizens that social fraud, no matter how creative, will be discovered and punished (Århus Kommune, 2010)

strange and none of them would ‘use their hard-earned money on paying an ex-husbands bill’. She was ejected from her house as she could not pay the rent anymore. Assisted by a lawyer she made a complaint to the municipality which was rejected because it did not explicitly contain the word ‘complaint’. At the moment the case is at the National Social Appeals Board.

Although the Ministry of Internal Affairs previously declared in relation to the treatment of a number of complaint cases in relation to social fraud, that there is no legal basis for making systematic observations and that all citizens have to be informed about ongoing investigations and gathering of information (KL, 2008a), this is exactly what happens and indeed what the Minister of Employment asks for in her response referred to above. The municipalities according to the same declaration from the Ministry have to make use of a principle of proportionality. Monitoring facebook profiles and surveillance techniques as ones outlined above definitely are out of proportion but the means seems to serve the goal as the practices continue. The citizen has a right to know when a case is made and investigations undertaken and basically should know which rules to meet whether it is stipulated through ‘contracts’ or part of the regular legislation. Tools like the surveillance ones transgress the limits of the contracts and obligations and are not transparent for the citizen. It is legitimated by the municipalities through the construction of the target group of single mothers as group prone to cheating and not living up to the obligations and expectations of the ‘good’ citizen. As the citizen has the duty to disclose all material facts it is vital that the citizens has the full information about the conditions and criteria but the notion of genuine single is characterized by uncertainty and complexity and it is extremely difficult for this target group to know what their rights are. In some municipalities, single mothers are for instance informed that a boyfriend can sleep over a couple of times a week but cannot take out the trash or help with buying things (Gaardmand & Gjerding, 2011). In other cases, the civil servant has told a social client if she could have sex with her ex-husband (ibid.). Decisions transgressing the normal level of intimacy expected and tolerated from the communication with authorities and conveying a strong normative and paternalist message on how social clients should behave. This type of communication is only possible because the social client is constructed as a weak, potentially undeserving recipient. The oversubscription of burdens and sanctions brings the system closer to the criminal system than the welfare system (*cf.* Gustafson; Wacquant). The municipal decisions on withdrawing social benefit and initiate a case is based on administrative judgment, but practice varies immensely between the municipalities. Scholars within law state that the evidence rarely is strong enough for the ordinary system of justice (Klingsey, Gaardmand & Gjerding, 2011). However, as already emphasised neither is this necessary as the municipalities only have to render it probable. It is, in other words, up the

discretion of the civil servant at work to decide if a social client should be accused of fraud. It is important to stress that the aim rarely is to get the social client convicted in the criminal system but ‘simply’ to terminate the payment for undeserving groups. Even though the municipalities breach the law by systematically monitoring a social client by the control units this does not have any consequences for the control unit. Moreover the data gathered through illegal means can still be used in the cases against the client no matter what. Even though a specialist from the parliamentary Ombudsman has stated that it is an illegal practice it nevertheless continues in the municipalities and the lack of consequences indirectly serves as an incentive to continue this practice (Gaardmand, 2011e). For instance, the strategy of creating false facebook profiles is clearly against the law. Although several political parties reacted against these practices in 2011 the practice was also supported. Consequently, the legal protection characterizing a liberal democracy is being undermined by illiberal and even illegal means. The problem is not mentioned in new agreement on better control from 2011. Indeed focus has been on creating extended remedies for the control groups, for instance to make unannounced visits to a targets home. In 2010 control units from 80 municipalities made a demand for expanded remedies for control to the Ministry of Employment.

The policy tools are connected to social target groups. Single mothers have been a primary target group in the municipalities endeavors to stop social fraud. Single mothers in the tips and stories coming out are depicted as having irresponsible lifestyles, receiving large social benefits, giving birth to more children than they can support and not meeting the norms of the middleclass (e.g. Gaardmand & Gjerding, 2011). Subsequently, they are a deviating group and not necessarily dependent no matter how weak a position they have in society.

Istahil, Laila, and Laily – same same but different?

The cases of Istahil and Laily illustrate how ethnicity and religion intersect with the construction of single mothers. Returning to the claims by Siim and Stoltz that single mothers have not been problematised other researchers like Bente Rosenbeck and Nina von Hiemcrone who both have made research in single mothers see the emergence of a new group of single mothers resembling the American welfare queen trope (in Gaardmand & Gjerding, 2011). Having ethnic minority background they add a cultural ‘explanation’ to existing problem making it even worse than before. This target group primarily lives in so-called ghettos and thereby reconfirms the government’s problematisation of these urban areas. Again there is no evidence that this group should be more inclined to social fraud than other single parents but the fact that ethnic minorities are

overrepresented in the total recipients of social benefit¹³ not only legitimates harsh actions and oversubscription of control instruments and punishment, but at the same time disregards sociological explanations and structural inequality. Single ethnic minority mothers tend to be in a particularly bad situation as their language skills can not always meet the requirements needed to understand one's rights. Neither is their cases taken up in a positive manner in the media. When the newspaper *information* in 2011 did a series of articles on single mothers and accusations of social fraud, none of the other media picked up the story until previously mentioned Sascha's case was described. The first three examples were Somali women but Sascha was a young sweet majority Dane and was invited into Danish TV. According to the producer, the Somali women were not fit for national broadcasting as "Muslims are difficult to propagate" (ibid.). As Schneider & Ingram argue not all groups have equal access to participation and mobilisation (Schneider & Ingram, 2005: 21).

Being ignored by TV is one thing but having an ethnic minority background – and in many cases another religious background – also leads to peculiar, and in fact, degenerative policy designs and tools. Many single mothers end up losing their social benefits due to their ex-husband not having volatile housing conditions, e.g. not having a proper flat, staying different places, and even being homeless. Often the control groups and civil servants have used this as evidence showing that the man must then be living with the ex-partner. Especially Somali men face difficulties in accepting divorces and losing authority and for some it leads to a rather unstable lifestyle which ends up damaging the ex-partner without that being the intention (see Nauja Kleist in Gaardmand, 2011d). Although it ought to be fairly easy to investigate this, the cases show that despite the women telling the authorities that they indeed are living on their own, the women's own statement are disregarded and they lose their entitlements (Gaardmand & Gjerding, 2011). In some cases, it is close to absurd as in the case of Laila where her ex-husband lived in Ukraine and yet the control group was decisive in her losing her social benefits (Gaardmand, 2011e). The citizens' advisor in Holbæk municipality tells that the majority of the single mothers coming into problem with the vaguely defined genuine single have ethnic minority background (Fasmer, 2011a). Sometimes this leads to losing the social benefits and in other cases a self-discipline and withdrawal from society to not risk losing their benefits. Holbæk has been an interesting case as it has made decisions on stopping social benefits and demanding back-payment in a number of cases targeting single Muslim mothers. The control unit has here used the

¹³ According to Albrekt Larsen and Dejgaard ethnic minorities received 28 percent of all social benefits in 2008 although constituting less than ten percent of the population (2012).

statements from an Imam to make the case that the social client was living in a marital-like relationship (Gaardmand, 2011g; Fasmer, 2011b).

CONCLUSION

Responsiveness to public preferences is considered to be central for policy-making. However, as the analysis has shown it does not follow that responsiveness improves democracy. The public perception that social fraud is rampant has not been supported empirically. Nevertheless, policy-makers and politicians have developed policy designs emphasising control, sanctions and punishment to overcome the problem of social fraud. The policy tools and rules are targeting weak and dependent groups. The case of the single mothers in Denmark illustrates an example of degenerative policy design damaging democracy rather than improving it. The construction of deserving and undeserving groups is not a new invention but a distinction which can be traced back to the establishment of the welfare state and social policies. However, the construction of the single mothers as an underserving group is a particular type of construction which also has its own history but which has currently taken a particular form which again has specific effects and consequences for the subjects. As the different stories found in the media show, the women represented as committing social fraud are stigmatised in the public. Many of the women described are not aware of possibilities or channels for complaining and end up accepting the municipal decisions and, as a consequence, end in poverty. The stories also show that the National Social Appeals Board have turned around many of the decisions of the municipality but can only do so if a case is taken to the board. Marginalising the women and not making sure that they are aware of their rights constitute a democratic problem and a problem for substantive citizenship.

Despite living in a liberal democracy the municipalities – supported and encouraged by the government – have created a framework where social clients in reality are guilty until proven otherwise but only having to render it probable that the person at stake is committing social fraud. Paradoxically, the information used in the cases are gathered through illegal means but nonetheless can be used in the social cases. If a local administration does not accept the explanation it has the right to stop funding. The municipalities act as both the executive and judicial power in this matter. In all other situations and dealings with the authorities, the citizen has the duty to disclose all material facts which will affect their financial situation and entitlement to benefits and it is assumed that people will actually do so and in general are constructed as law-abiding citizens. Yet, in the case of single parents, they have to submit a signed document stating that they indeed are genuine singles to maintain the financial

support. The message here is that this group of citizens is prone to committing fraud and has to be controlled. This is a powerful construction of a social target group which not alone conveys a message of the perceived value of that group but also strips them of established rights and separates them from the broader citizenry. In any society there will be people committing fraud, also among single parents. However, the system developed to control the single parents/genuine singles is characterized by weak guidelines and high complexity, making it difficult for the citizens to actually know what their rights are. The guidelines are interpreted differently in different municipalities but instead of clarifying the rules and creating transparency the politicians have increased the powers granted to the control groups. This strengthens the message to this particular target group of deviating from the general population. This is not only the attitude of the right-winged parties but also one formulated by the central left. When the Socialist People's Party (SF) suggested in late 2011 that the control with social clients should be removed from the control units and placed within the police force to secure the legal rights of citizens, the Social Democratic Spokesperson for Social Affairs Mette Frederiksen, now Minister of Employment, was against it and stated that, if anything, the control units should have even more powers allocated to pursue and monitor social clients (Gaardmand & Gjerding, 2011). The criminalisation of dependent groups is embedded in the neoliberal political rationality informing much policy-making. Likewise the austerity demands have further spurred this development. Dismissing or ignoring structural conditions and socio-economic realities and how they influence marginalised people's lives has become a common strategy. Instead, responsibility is placed on the individual. There are no political gains in challenging this message which the Social Democrats vividly illustrate in the position outlined above. A strange position considering their historical role in constructing the welfare state. The rather simplistic logic prevailing is that people should support themselves and contribute to the common good. Duties are emphasized more than rights and we witness a general retrenchment of established rights. Put quite simple, the problem is what if there are no available jobs? The Danish national ethos is based on a conviction that the labour market will absorb the increased supply of labour although there is no empirical evidence for this theoretical claim. When being unemployed is equated with being undeserving we see a corrosion of democracy and institutionalized degenerative policy designs as the one outlined in this article strengthens this tendency. As Siim and Stoltz also wrote it is true that single mothers are not distinguished from single parents in general but the parent having the custody (or major part of it) is still legally dependent on the other parent not only economically (as a potential co-provider) but also in terms of life-style as the cases show. As most single parents, according to statistics, indeed are women the category of genuine single becomes gendered and in this way connects to the negatively constructed stereotypes of the welfare mother (irresponsible, lazy,

promiscuous, inclined so social fraud). This indirectly reproduces a particular understanding of the ‘normal’ family consisting of a mother and a father living together and as other family forms deviating from the ‘normal’ are met with skepticism and occasionally distrust. The target group of single mothers is not gendered however but also has categories of ethnicity, class and religion embedded in the construction as the cases of Istahil, Laily, and Laila illustrate. Somalis are presented/stigmatised as particular hard to integrate (e.g. Dørge, 2010) which feeds into the construction of the single Somali mothers. Likewise, class-issues can not be ignored when we look at the construction of single mothers. The lower classes are not ‘mothers by choice’ in the privileged sense. Freedom, self-choices, and flexibility as Wacquant claims, can be felt at the top but the same choices are not available at the bottom of society where many single mothers are positioned and targeted through restrictive, paternalist and authoritarian policies and attitudes.

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